

*O you, who shone illustrious by so many miracles, wrought in the bodies of the sick, bring us the help of Christ to heal our sick souls. R̄ Fulfil, O Father, what you have said, and help us by your prayers.*

These words of the *O Spem* are familiar to us, even if we more often chant them in Latin, but if we take a moment to reflect upon them we may be a little surprised by the emphasis on *the bodies of the sick* – even if, at this present moment in the midst of an epidemic, they take on a sudden relevance.

Yes, we know St Dominic did perform miracles in his lifetime – he is even said to have raised several people from death – but surely we read in the Constitutions, and indeed in the Primitive Constitutions – that our Order was founded “for preaching and the salvation of souls.”

Ah, but what a mistake we would make if we thought that spiritual health could be divorced from physical health! The very heresy which Dominic founded the Order to combat, Albigensianism or Catharism – made just such a divorce. Since the Cathars believed a bad god had made the material world, for them the human body was something to be spurned, subdued and ultimately escaped. Dominic's penances had an altogether different purpose: not to spurn the body and its creator, but rather to bring body and spirit alike, both of which are damaged by the reality of original sin, back into harmony with the purpose of the creator – or rather, to open body and soul to the grace of God, which alone can restore harmony to humanity.

That great Dominican, our brother Saint Thomas, shows us that, while our souls, being spiritual, continue to live when they are separated from our bodies at death, the life of a “separated soul” is incomplete until it is reunited with the body at the resurrection on the last day: God's salvation is about the whole person, soul and body together.

Whenever we minister to the sick – whether the sick in body, especially with the Sacrament of Anointing, or the sick in spirit with the Sacrament of Reconciliation – we fulfil the purpose of Saint Dominic by preaching the saving truth that God reveals to us in Christ.

Blessed Humbert, the fifth Mass of the Order, reminded the friars of his day that “it is characteristic of good men to bear one another's infirmities”, and so

on this St Dominic's Day it is particularly appropriate for us to remember in prayer the sick – those in our community and Order, but also for those in the wider community, especially at this time of epidemic.

Gathered here to celebrate Mass each morning, it could be easy for us to forget how privileged we are at the moment: Many people in Melbourne live alone : we are in a large-ish community. Others are confined to a flat, or, if lucky, may have a small backyard. We have these beautiful grounds in which to stroll. Above all, though, our people are deprived of the sacraments for weeks on end, in fact, for months. We still have daily Mass.

If we feel frustration or negativity at this time, it should not be for our own privations, which are, after all, rather light: it should rather be that we cannot serve our people, that in particular we cannot minister the sacraments to them.

This morning I urge you to pray for an end to the epidemic, yes, but also for our people, that their faith will remain strong, even in a time of isolation. That indeed Dominic, *who shone illustrious by so many miracles, wrought in the bodies of the sick, may bring us the help of Christ* both for body and soul. That indeed, as he promised on his deathbed, he may be more useful to us in death than he was in life.

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*Preached to the community at St Dominic's, Camberwell*

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